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The Shepherds

A CHRISTMAS ANALOGY



ALLAN PEARSON SHATFORD

The Shepherds

A Christmas Analogy

By Allan Pearson Shatford

With the author's Christmas wishes



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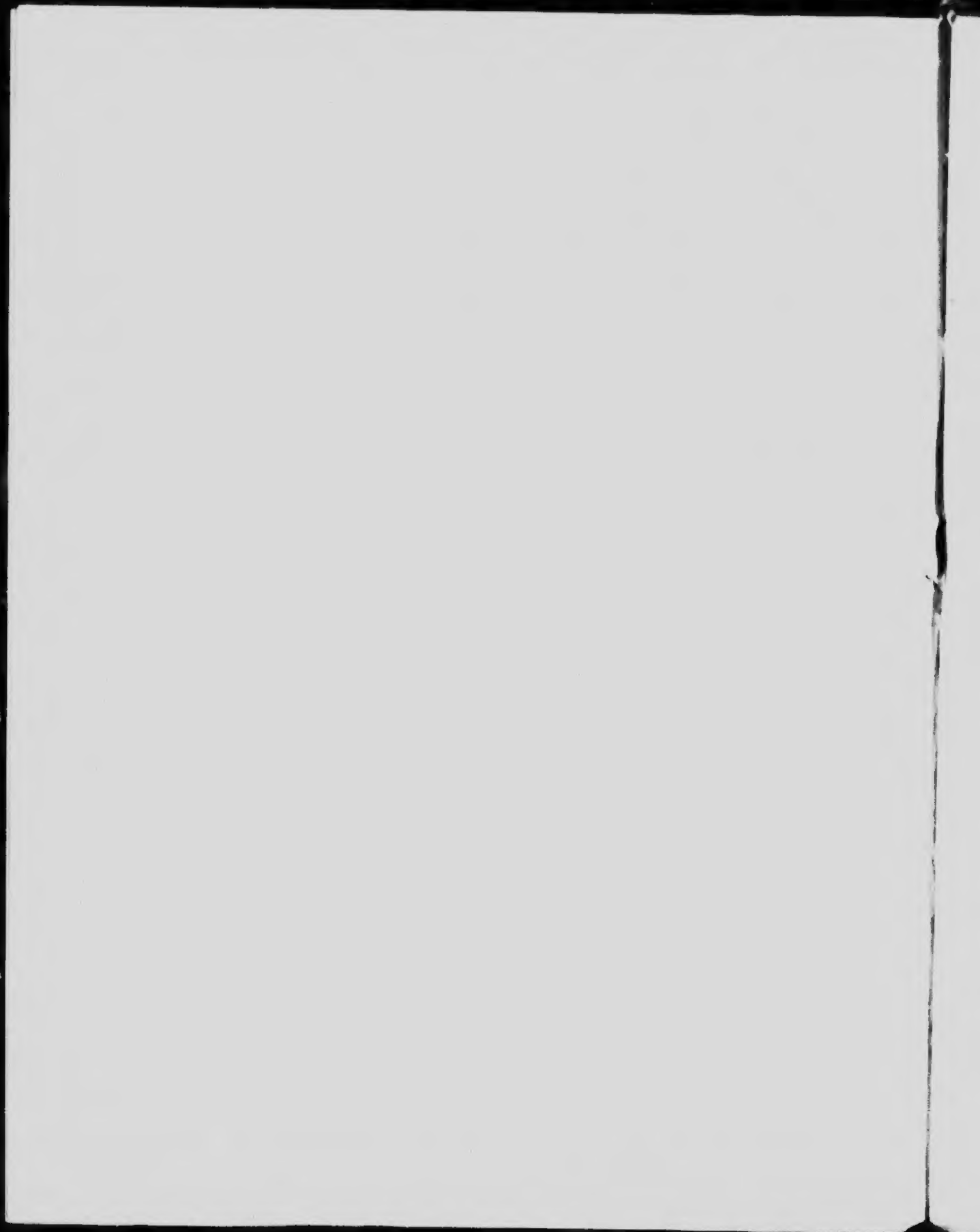
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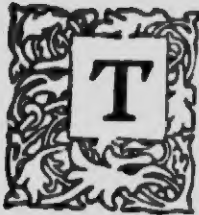
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I

Keeping watch over their Flocks

"And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the fields, keeping watch over their flocks."—St. Luke ii. 8.



THE town of North-ea occupied a commanding position, standing upon the edge of a magnificent, land-locked harbour. Besides being a shipping place of importance, it offered a secure haven for storm-tossed ships, and it was not at all unusual to see a hundred or more craft riding upon its placid waters. It was a port of call for the fishing fleet during the spring and autumn months. On their way to the Grand Banks the fishermen came here for bait, as the coast abounded in squid and herring; and on their return for supplies, and to report the season's catch.

The town nestled under the shadow of towering hills, whose tops were covered with a scrawny growth of spruce and fir. These hills contained great deposits of valuable ore, and had been the scene of quarrying activity for many years. Huge ferries daily carried tons of the ore to the southern side of

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the harbour, where large smelting furnaces operated and, incidentally, poured their black columns of smoke upon the indignant little town.

For a long time there had been bad blood between the fishermen and the quarrymen. Town gossip attributed this to a terrible accident that had occurred generations ago. Half a mile above the town there was a long pier running out into the harbour, from which the ore was shipped. It was not considered safe for any vessel to anchor inside this pier, for just at this point the quarries approached very closely to the water's edge, and during blasting operations, pieces of rock were often hurled out into the harbour. But one terribly stormy night, a fishing vessel moored well inside the ore pier, under the lee of the precipitous cliff. In the early morning a tremendous blast, that shook the hills and boomed around the harbour, sent a huge piece of rock hurtling over the precipice, and by ill chance it crashed upon the vessel's deck, bored its way through the craft and sunk her immediately, carrying a dozen men to death. It was the first shot of a long, miserable war. And since that day, whenever the fishing fleet would come to Northsea, the town would be a scene of rioting and drunkenness, and bitter, cruel fighting.

One night, a night never to be forgotten, this feud reached an acute stage. It was Saturday, and "Pay-Day" with the quarrymen. There was an unusually large number of vessels in port, and the streets were full of rough and boisterous men. Like all seaport towns Northsea was infested with saloons and dives of the worst repute, and the liquor sold was of such quality that it required very little to convert a man into a raving brute. Here the quarrymen and fisher-

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men congregated, and before many minutes had passed, free fights were going on, loud blasphemy issued from a score of disreputable houses, and the cries of frightened wives made the night hideous. Along the entire length of Water Street it was unsafe to venture without adequate protection.

About ten o'clock, an unoffending woman might have been seen hurrying along the upper side of the street, trying to shield herself from notice by keeping within the shadows of the shops and houses. She was closely hooded and poorly clad, and carried upon her arm a basket of eggs and butter which she hoped to exchange for other provisions at the store where she traded once a fortnight. Her heart was beating wildly with fear, for she must hasten home to the little babe whom she had left sleeping in the humble cottage behind the hill. Just then, a knot of reeling, boisterous men tumbled out of a saloon immediately opposite and staggered across the street. She quickly concealed herself within a little alley, but not soon enough, for one of the men had noticed her. "Hi, there, my pretty girl," he hic-coughed, and lurched towards her. "Come out and let us see yer face." Roughly he seized her and pulled her towards his companions.

"One of these cursed quarry women, I suppose," he shouted, and forthwith pushed her nearer the light. They pulled off her hood and drunkenly looked into her white face and fearing eyes. She could not even scream, her heart was so gripped with fear.

"What's in yer basket, my beauty?" roared another of the men.

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He tore it from her arm and flung aside the covering. Then a coarse shout of laughter burst from them all.

"Eggs and butter, hey? Carrying them home to your rock-smashing husband, are ye? Well, here's his nice breakfast spoiled, curse him." And so saying, he upturned the basket, and the contents smashed upon the sidewalk, and were trampled under the rough feet of her assailants.

"And now we'll spoil his pretty wife for him," cried another. Filthy hands tore at her clothing, and foul faces, reeking with whiskey, pressed closer to her own. She fought with the fury of a tigress, but her strength was unequal to theirs. She felt her knees giving way. Then her ears caught the noise of carriage wheels. Summoning every ounce of her remaining strength, she uttered a piercing shriek and sank unconscious to the pavement. But her cry for help was answered.

Almost immediately the carriage reached the place. The Stranger from the country pulled up his smoking horse and leaped to the sidewalk. Laying about him with the heavy stock of his whip he threw himself against the men with the rage of a wounded lion. It was only the work of an instant to drive the skulking brutes from the scene. Then, kneeling by the prostrate woman, he gently raised her head and at once discovered that she was not seriously hurt. He began vigorously to chafe her hands and wrists in the hope of restoring her to consciousness.

It was not long before a crowd collected. Many eager questions were asked, and in a few, short, angry sentences the man told what little he knew.

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"Does any one know this woman?" and he swept the crowd into his hurried glance. "Or where she lives?"

"She is Betty Andrews," answered one of the spectators. "She lives in a little cottage behind the Ore mountain. It is at least four miles to her house."

"But is there no place where she can be lodged for the night? To what church does she belong? Can we not send for her clergyman?"

There were murmurs and whispers among the crowd and a very awkward pause. Then his previous informant, with a shrug of his shoulders, vouchsafed a reply.

"I'm afraid she has no minister. She does not bear a very good reputation among the churches. She lives alone with her nameless child, and only comes to town to do her little shopping, and then generally at night."

"But good God," cried the stranger in astonishment, "is there no Christianity in the place? Is it such a heathen town that a woman can be assaulted by drunken ruffians, and just because she has not been pleased to tell her history to every gossiping busybody, must she become an outcast with none to help her?"

A moaning sigh escaped the woman's lips and she opened her eyes. Knowing at once that this man was her friend, she cried piteously: "Oh, take me home, take me home to my poor child."

The Stranger bent closer and said very gently to her: "Will you come with me? I have a carriage here and will be glad to drive you home. But are you not too weak?"

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"Oh no, take me home, please," she cried. "See, I am strong and well." With a brave effort she stood upon her feet, and clinging desperately to her unknown friend, begged to be taken home.

Not a soul in the crowd had offered assistance.

"Stand aside" commanded her rescuer, in tones of scornful resentment. Tenderly he helped her into the carriage, climbed up beside her and with an angry crack of his whip sent his horse racing down the street.

Now the scene of that night might have justified any visitor in supposing that this was a heathen town. Nevertheless, his conclusion would have been radically wrong. For Northsea was plentifully endowed with churches, there being no less than seven, representing as many different religious bodies, each presided over by a duly certificated Shepherd, anxious for the welfare of his flock.

First in point of history was the Anglican Church. When the town was settled over one hundred years ago, the inhabitants were entirely English, and members of the Established church. There was a bright future in prospect, so a large and handsome church was erected. It had a seating capacity of about fifteen hundred and was well appointed in every way. But for various reasons the succeeding generations lost their love for the old historic church, and the present congregation only numbered about two hundred. Some declared that the Rectors had been too narrow in their churchmanship or too dry and old-fashioned in their theology, so the membership dwindled away. The present incumbent had been there twenty-five years. He was a kindly soul, but

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positive in the assurance that *his* church was the only survivor of the ancient Catholic and Apostolic church. It was a pitiful struggle trying to keep body and soul together on his fast-decreasing stipend. But he kept faithful watch over his people lest by any neglect of his, some should stray into another fold.

Then there was the Roman chapel, a small building set upon the highest eminence in the town. Its large gilt cross, shining in the sun, could be seen from the far side of the harbour. The Priest was a young man and full of fiery zeal for the Catholic faith. To him there was no chance of salvation outside of the Roman fold. It was strange, that with this view he never attempted to draw Protestants into his church, though he was at some pains to publicly condemn their doctrines.

The Non-Conformists were all represented. They considered the Roman church to be Babylon, the Mother of Harlots, mentioned in the Apocalypse, and between her and the Anglican church there was only a paper wall of partition. Their sermons were red flags of danger to all who looked with favoring eyes in the Roman or Anglican direction.

These seven Shepherds were as much strangers to one another as if they had belonged to different religions. So sharply were the lines drawn that it was considered disloyal to the fold, if any member patronized the business of a merchant belonging to another church. Every attempt at corporate union had failed. The Temperance cause lacked support because these men could not join forces in a common cause. Hence, the drink traffic had full sway in

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Northsea, there being six flourishing dives to every struggling church in the town. It was even whispered that some of the proprietors of saloons were strong financial supporters of a certain church and had threatened to leave and go elsewhere if the Shepherd preached too strongly on temperance. And rather than lose anybody to another flock the minister permitted himself to be muzzled. At one time an effort was made to hold a public meeting in the interests of the Bible Society, but the only clergyman who was willing to attend and urge his congregation to go was of the same denomination as the speaker of the evening. How could any minister conscientiously patronize an assembly, held under the auspices of another church, without seriously compromising himself with his people?

The denominational church papers were a source of great strength, and consequently the congregations were urged to loyally subscribe for their own magazines. These periodicals always recorded faithfully, and in a conspicuous place, any ministers who had "come over" to the true fold. The Anglican "Churchman" reported in its last issue extracts from the Bishop's charge. One was to the effect that "twenty per cent. of last year's candidates for Confirmation were drawn from the other religious bodies." And the Synod applauded heartily this cheering statement. The editorials of each paper were chiefly concerned with combatting the cherished doctrines of some other church or maintaining the sectarian differences of its own. The reader could almost see the fur fly as one Christian proceeded to tear the other to pieces. Such weighty matters as

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the colour of a vestment, the amount of water in baptism, the kind of wine in the Lord's Supper, the posture in prayer, and a hundred other significant subjects, occupied pages of space and made the raciest reading. Then, everybody was aware of the bitter warfare, not yet ended, caused by one of the churches having rendered null and void a marriage that had been consummated more than a year before. Even in so important a matter as the safeguarding of the home, it seemed impossible for the churches to agree. What mattered it that a woman was sent out into the world with a tarnished reputation, or an innocent child was held to be nameless and illegitimate, so long as a blow was struck at other churches and their power to perform marriages called in question?

It was well known that a large percentage of people in the town never darkened the doors of a church. But the Shepherds were so busy watching their present flocks that they dared not leave them and go after the "other sheep" outside of any fold. There were the fishermen, for instance, and many of the quarrymen. No doubt much good could be done if the churches would provide a place for these men and thus offset the evil influence of the saloon. But where was the money to come from? Was it not a bitter and weary struggle, backed up by continual Sunday appeals and various bazaars and concerts, to collect enough money for their own needs? And when one thought of the beggarly stipends of these Shepherds, his heart was moved with sympathy and pride, for they undoubtedly sacrificed much and worked hard for the welfare of their flocks. Why,

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the combined salaries of the seven were not equal to the income of a doctor or a lawyer in the town, so what could be expected? No single church could undertake this much-needed clubhouse for the hard-working labourer, and it would be detrimental to the denominational interest for the churches to band together. Church doctrine must be preserved at all costs. There were certain heritages of faith that one dared not barter away. Fidelity to the trust reposed in him by the Church of his Fathers demanded of each Shepherd that he should plod heroically on, and keep the flock committed to his care.

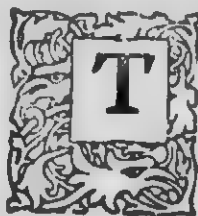
And so, while the ministers of Northsea ploughed each his lonely furrow with jealous regard for his people, a carriage climbed the Ore Mountain a little before midnight. Its occupants were a man, who lived a simple country life, ready always to serve his fellow men without regard to class or creed; and a woman, whose heart yearned with a Christ-like love and compassion for a child that was not her own.

II

The Angel of the Lord

"And the Angel of the Lord stood by them and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.

"And the Angel said unto them: Be not afraid, for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy."—St. Luke ii. 9, 10.



THE tragedy of Betty Andrews was known only to one person in the world and he was not likely to make it public. It happened on this wise: She and her girl-companion were the product of the quiet, country farm-house. They had romped together in the fields, sat together in the same form at school, and when they were eighteen had gone up to the city together in order to find larger opportunities for their full-blooded powers and racing ambitions. Both were comely, attractive, and filled with the love of a pleasant life. As yet they were heart-whole. There was in them both a deep capacity of love and devotion, but thus far no man had awakened them to the consciousness of life's crowning glory.

They had not been long in the city when they met a physician who occupied a prominent place in social

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circles. He was an active worker in one of the churches and a man of influence. Handsome, energetic, and full of humour, he was likewise quick to appreciate the unusual beauty and attractiveness of the two girls. He was able to help them in many ways, and his companionship meant much to two orphaned, unsophisticated young women in a strange city. His advice had been most valuable, and his assistance in the preparation of their tidy little flat was beyond praise. And there he was often a welcome visitor.

Thus the months rolled gaily on, ripening into closest intimacy what seemed to be a pure and generous friendship. Betty's companion appeared to surrender herself more freely than wisely to the charms of these happy hours. There was an abandon about her that alarmed Betty. But she good-naturedly laughed away all fears and went heedlessly on towards disaster. When the crisis came, Betty's indignation swept like a maelstrom about her friend's betrayer. The doctor could not stand against the fury of her assault, but he was a master hand at apologies, and convinced even Betty that he meant to do the honourable thing.

The pitiful tragedy ended in the death of the wan little mother as she gave her child into the keeping of her loyal companion. For her girl-friend, Betty had not a word of reproach, but face to face with the destroyer of their home and happiness, she again let free all the pent-up fury of her righteous wrath upon him and the church which trusted him. He offered to provide for the child, but with withering scorn Betty refused to touch a penny of his wealth.

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And such is the wondrous love of woman that the unwedded mother died breathing benedictions upon him.

Betty had now before her the problem of providing against the future. She had a little store of money, and with it she immediately rented the cottage at the rear of Northsea mountain, where she hoped to hide herself from the world and gain a measure of peace and quiet. Her farming experience was a valuable asset now. She bought a cow and some poultry and set earnestly to work in the interests of the nameless babe. Her very heart was entwined about the little boy. Each week a deeper joy was added to her life until she was beginning to think that the child was really her own. The deep wells of maternity stirred in her own life and she became deliciously happy in her mother-service.

But Northsea refused to let her alone. She had been troubled with impertinent visitors and their questions, until her patience gave way and she turned a deaf ear and cold heart to her gossiping persecutors. Her bitterness might have melted under the kindness of Christian treatment, but this she failed to get from the Northsea churches. So she kept her own counsel and went heroically about her work.

She rarely went into town, only when sheer necessity compelled her. And then she went at night, for it was easy to slip away after the little lad had gone asleep, watched over by her faithful dog, whose fidelity was of rarer quality than that of many husbands and fathers. And she was less likely to be worried at night by prying eyes and slandering tongues. But these visits were always hateful,

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because a fear continually haunted her that some mischief might befall the lad during her absence. Up to this time Bruno had been a faultless protector. Upon her return she would find him lying by the little cot, or sitting up with his forepaws on its edge, gently swinging it to and fro, and so lulling back to sleep the restless and disturbed child. The boy was bonnie babe and Bruno was his devoted slave.

The night of her anguished experience with the uncouth and drunken fishermen was made doubly horrible at one moment by the thought that she might never see the child again. She cared nothing for her own life. Gladly would she have given it to protect one hair of her dear laddie's head. How her heart leaped and bounded to-night as the horse, which drew her homeward, tediously climbed the long hill.

"Oh, can't we go a little faster, please? My dear boy, my bonnie darling," she moaned piteously. And the man urged his steaming steed up the road and comforted her as best he could.

On this eventful Saturday night a most strange thing happened in the homes of the seven Shepherds. Each had given the final touches to his Sunday sermon. There was a glow of satisfaction as the sentences rounded off in ringing defence of the Faith. The wavering sheep would be driven back into the fold by the stinging whip of ecclesiastical authority, and perchance a few might be coaxed from the other folds by this splendid statement of the scheme of salvation. Well, it was time for bed. One must get a good rest in order to be equipped for the morrow's duty. The subject had been well advertised and, no doubt, there would be a large con-

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gregation present to hear the polemic against false doctrine and the championship of the true. So thought each Shepherd, as he composed himself to slumber.

But almost immediately each was awake and sitting up in bed, wide-eyed and trembling. For an unusual light filled the room. Eagerly they consulted their watches, only to find that it was not yet midnight. What did it mean?

And then an imperious voice seemed to call. It was not external. It sounded in the heart and soul of each—and its urgency was great.

"You are needed, you are needed. Dress quickly and follow the light. Be not afraid." No second summons was necessary. Instantly each Shepherd was pulling on his clothes, and catching up an outer coat, hurried out of the house. All sense of location was lost, but urged by some mysterious power they hastened forward. They did not see one another. All about them there was a light that shone gloriously, and yet not one of them thought of trying to locate his surroundings. They had no idea of their destination. But some master power impelled them on and on, with a growing sense of great need awaiting them.

Then the supernal light melted away, the controlling force vanished, and with dazed and wondering eyes they found themselves together in front of a house, shrouded with flames of fire. Instantly they recognized the cottage of Betty Andrews. And just at that moment a shriek of anguish rent the midnight air.

"My God, my child, my sweet child! Oh, save him, save him!"

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The horse had gained the crest of the hill, and at the first glimpse of the burning house, the woman leaped straight from the carriage and with super-human strength and speed reached the place where the ministers stood.

The lower part of the cottage was a sheet of seething flames. Long tongues of fire darted through broken windows and leaped up towards the roof. There was not the slightest chance of entering the building from the ground floor. There was neither ladder nor water within reach. And the roar of crackling and rending beams drowned discussion. Just then the deep bark of a dog was heard from the window in the west end.

"Oh, he is up there in that room. Can not some one reach him? Dear Lord, my darling boy!"

Immediately the Shepherds set to work. The stoutest and strongest stood beneath the window and bade a brother-shepherd climb upon his shoulders. But the window could not be reached. Then a third, with old-time agility, hugged the bodies of his fellows and so gripped the sill of the window. With bare hands he smashed the glass and tore away the sashes until a gaping hole revealed Bruno carrying in his mouth what seemed to be a bundle of clothes. The dog staggered to the window and held up his precious burden for the tottering Shepherd to take. Quickly but carefully the child was handed down to the others. The Roman Priest tore off his cassock and wrapping it about the child gave him into the arms of the wailing woman.

"Thank God! My boy, my boy!" And holding him close to her breast she undid the clothes from

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about his face. The shrill cry of the infant sent the blood surging back to her heart. She sank quietly to the earth and the flood of tears eased the pain in her soul.

"Don't come down," cried the under Shepherd, as the man at the top of the human ladder was about to descend. "Call the dog." But there was no answer to the urgent call. And just then a huge volume of black smoke, tinged with red flame, shot through the broken window and sent the topmost man reeling from his position. But the ministers below were watching and caught him so as to break his fall. Bruno had suffocated in the smoke. He had given his life for his little friend. And another act of heroism was added to the long record of faithful animals.

The home was a hopeless ruin. Nothing could be saved there. So the Shepherds turned their attention to the woman and the child. They were soon made comfortable with the heavy coats which the ministers had by good fortune brought with them.

"Let them be taken at once to the Rectory," said the gray-haired, kindly parson, whose age had prevented him from much active service up to this moment. "My wife and daughter will be delighted to take care of them." So the Stranger's horse was again in demand. The woman, hugging closely her child, was gently assisted into the carriage and instructions were given as to the location of the Rector's home. And for a second time that night the heart of the countryman was made glad in the ministry of love and compassion.

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The Shepherds remained until the last embers of the ruins smouldered out. Then they wended their way down the hill. It was a cold autumn morning and the Priest shivered without his accustomed cassock, but his heart was warm with the fire of a new love. The hands of the Baptist were bleeding from the wounds inflicted by the broken glass, but his feet seemed treading on air, so buoyant was his step. The backs and shoulders of the Presbyterian and Lutheran ached from their strenuous burden of the night, but there was comfort in their souls. And as the Methodist and Congregational ministers coughed the smoke from their throats, their hearts were uttering hymns of praise. The silver-haired Rector, collarless and with black and grimy face, moved along with the calm dignity habitual to him.

These men were brothers. For the first time they walked together in the consciousness of it. Theirs had been the privilege to-night of a common service. It knit them together as nothing else could have done. It broke down the barriers that had so long kept them apart. Instinctively their hands reached out towards each other and met in Christian fraternalness. The dawning day crept up the Eastern sky, and focussing in a single beam of light, threw its crimson glory over the Shepherds. It may have been fancy or the echo of the joy in their own hearts, but they thought that they heard a chorus of divinest music, chanting: "Peace on earth to men of good-will."

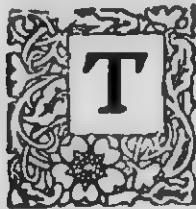
As they separated at the entrance to the town and went to their respective homes, each one realized that it would be impossible for him to preach the sermon he had so carefully prepared.

III

The Symposium of the Shepherds

"The shepherds said one to another, Let us now go and see this thing that is come to pass which the Lord hath made known to us."

St. Luke ii. 15.



HERE was a new spirit in the little town of Northsea. The sermons preached by the Shepherds on the eventful Sunday had occasioned tremendous surprise and much comment. The note of denominationalism was absolutely lacking. Ecclesiasticism gave place to a broad and tolerant spirit of Christian charity.

The story of the shameful riot on the previous night, and of the destruction of the Andrews' cottage, was briefly mentioned, and used as an illustration of the need of corporate unity on the part of the churches. Not a word of condemnation passed the lips of the preacher. The churches were held responsible for the furious act of the fishermen... Attention ought long ago to have been given to the matter of providing respectable places of recreation for these hard-working sons of the sea. They had been shamefully left to the untoward social conditions

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of the saloon and brothel. Hitherto, it had been the sole effort of the religious organizations to look after the sheep already in the fold—there had been little endeavour to draw in the "black" sheep. And the ministers themselves shouldered a large part of the blame for this neglect. The sermons were the talk of the town, and for the most part the people heartily agreed with them, while a few of the more consecrated souls heartened the preachers by an earnest assurance of sympathy.

The Shepherds led the way towards oneness. They met as brothers and talked over the situation. It was a common sight now for passers-by to see two or three of them in earnest conversation. The doors of their respective homes were hospitably open, and many a night two of them were closeted together in discussion of plans for the future. Old differences were examined and found to be less separating than was at one time supposed. For the first time in Northsea's history prayer was made in all the churches for union. So the weeks rolled on, until conditions were ripe for a common meeting of all the Shepherds.

It was a bleak December day. The snow had fallen over the land for twenty-four hours until all the sharp expressions of the mountain and town were covered in spotless white as with a mantle of charity. On this day the ministers had agreed to meet and spend the entire time in frank and open discussion of their positions.

The Rectory was chosen for the important conference, just because the Anglican Church was the first in the field and the Rector was the senior in years and residence. They were to break bread

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together at noon and the women of the Rectory were busy in preparation. Betty Andrews was the very life and humour of the house. She had been transformed since the terrible night when her child was in danger. All bitterness had died out of her heart and she was now ready, by every art at her command, to further this crusade against narrowness and division.

The large library was glowing with the light and warmth of the huge fireplace. The big logs crackled and spat out their tiny black coals as though in sympathy with the desire of the Shepherds to eliminate the small things that had so long kept them from their best work.

The Rector was chosen chairman and led the brethren in simple, extempore prayer for love and wisdom. His full, rich voice trembled with emotion. When the prayer closed with a word of thanksgiving for recent blessings, the "Amen" was sincere and hearty. It recalled the Eucharistia of Apostolic days.

The chairman's address was simple and effective. With beating heart he told them of the change that had come into his own life. With the skill of an artist he sketched the recent events and strongly affirmed it as his conviction that the Spirit of God had been manifested in all the incidents. Now that they had come together for free discussion of their agreements and differences, it would be wisest to be perfectly frank with each other, holding back nothing, but refraining from bitterness, for that was an element which never helped men towards the truth.

"As the eldest servant of God," he began, "and

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the least worthy, for in this matter of sectarianism I have been a very great offender—perhaps you will permit me, for the sake of clearness and orderliness, to give direction to the debate.”

He paused a moment. There was an instant murmur of approval—nothing could please the Shepherds better.

“Perhaps it would be well for us to divide our conference into two main heads,” and the Rector straightened his shoulders and tossed back his long, gray hair, as his parishioners had so often seen him do, when entering upon the heavier part of his sermon. “Let us spend the morning in considering the particular truth or doctrine which each church emphasizes as especially important. What we want, I take it, is the maximum and not the minimum of truth. We need an inclusive, Catholic faith—not a church of elimination and exclusion. So it may be well for us to find out what particular heritage each communion can bring into the Christian faith.”

This seemed a reasonable statement, but some of those present knitted their brows as though in perplexity as to the differentiating article of their individual churches.

“Then,” continued the Rector, “we might go on to consider the points where we disagree—the doctrines held by some which do not appear to others to be essential or a part of the original deposit. It is a perfectly simple division—first the essentials, and then the non-essentials.”

There was an awkward pause as the Rector sat down. Each Shepherd looked upon his neighbour as though waiting for him to begin.

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"It is going to be a little difficult to maintain that division," said the Presbyterian minister, "because what some of us regard as essentials, others may consider to be non-essential."

"Not at all, my good brother," replied the chairman. "When we come to any question which offers debatable ground, as to our twofold division of subjects, we will pass it on to the conference of this afternoon. Now, to expedite matters, let me ask our friend the Roman Catholic Priest for a statement of those doctrines which he considers that his church holds necessary to the true faith, and which are not found among the Protestants."

The Priest braced himself for a clear and comprehensive reply. "The Catholic Church differs from the Protestants in almost every article of the creed. You seem to have lost the real conception of the church. You have no infallible authority in matters of doctrine. You have broken away from the Apostolic succession and have, therefore, forfeited the grace of Orders. Consequently your Sacraments are void of meaning and value to the soul."

"Hold a moment," cried the Lutheran minister, whose inherited Protestantism rose against this sweeping statement, "I cannot allow these assertions. We *do* believe in the church, founded by Christ as a way of salvation. We hold that the church in her corporate capacity is the authority, and not any single member of it. We firmly believe in the two sacraments and unfailingly administer them. And we hold tenaciously to a regular ministry, insisting that no man taketh this office to himself but he that is called

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of God. Our interpretation of these things may be different from yours, but we consider them all essential to the church."

There was a lively debate between these two for fifteen minutes, when the chairman rapped upon the table and called them back to the order of the day.

"I fear we are getting away from points of agreement and are dealing with differences. But this sharp passage has served a good turn. Let us see if we cannot assent to a few general propositions. First, we all agree that Jesus Christ founded a Church as a means of salvation. The nature and particulars regarding it are another matter." There was ready agreement to this statement.

"Secondly, we believe that the members of the church are united to its Head and to one another by spiritual union and are to express that union in love and service."

A slight hesitation ensued here.

"But how and when does membership in the church take place?" queried the Baptist.

"By baptism, of course," replied the Priest. "And as soon after birth as possible.

"With that position I cannot agree," was the immediate reply. "Christ undoubtedly made personal belief in Him antecedent to baptism. Only those who are capable of intelligent faith can be members of the church. And my church requires baptism by immersion for all believers before they can be regarded as church members."

There was a very chorus of protests here and a lengthy discussion. It was finally agreed that baptism is the door of entrance into the church. As

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lay-baptism is considered valid even in the Roman and Anglican communions, then all baptized people, by whomsoever the ceremony was performed, must be regarded as members of the Christian church.

"Even though we may only be godly laymen," good-naturedly declared the Methodist minister, "our baptisms must be valid. According to your own standards"—and here he looked pointedly at the Roman and Anglican Shepherds—"you have a responsibility towards our people."

"Then we are agreed that baptism is a sacrament essential to church membership," said the chairman. "The time and method of its administration, whilst important, are matters upon which we must be sorry to disagree."

The assent to this proposition was not quite as hearty as to previous ones, but it was received as the best statement that could be formulated upon a question which offered such wide scope for disagreement.

"Again, I may assume that we all hold that Christ instituted another sacrament, the Lord's Supper, as a means of fellowship and grace, whilst we differ as to its method of administration and value to the soul." No opposition to this was manifested.

"But these are not the only sacraments," declared the Roman Priest. "The Catholic church believes in five others. They are means of grace, and ordinances of Christ just as truly as Baptism and the Eucharist."

Here was wide ground for debate. The Anglican minister seemed to provide a bridge that spanned the great gulf between Romanism and Protestantism on this point.

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"We may admit," he said, "that there are other sacraments, such as Holy Orders, Confirmation, Marriage, Penance, Extreme Unction. All these partake of a sacramental character, but we cannot think that they are to be placed upon the same plane as the two great sacraments. Nor do we believe that the Roman church in her formularies considers them of the same importance. Am I not right in this?" he asked the priest.

This puzzled the Roman a little. He did not like to make a declaration that would imply a distinction between the sacraments, but the practise of his church unquestionably lifted Baptism and the Holy Communion to a higher place than that given to the other five. He, therefore, acknowledged that the Mass was the first and greatest Sacrament, and that Baptism was different in degree though not in kind from the other five.

"Then we may accept the conclusion," said the Rector, "that we all believe in the two sacraments as occupying the chiefest place, whilst we are content to differ about the value and order of the other Christian ordinances."

The conference then passed to the consideration of another essential in Christian doctrine.

"The ministry, I fear, is the rock upon which we split up into more serious factions," quickly declared the Methodist, as though anxious to avoid any misunderstanding of his position.

"But may we not agree that a ministry is essential?" said the Presbyterian, who was particularly strong on Apostolical succession. "Did not Christ ordain Apostles?"

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Here there was a very Babel of conversation, until there seemed some danger of heat, when the Rector ordered the subject to be put upon the agenda for the afternoon.

"But let us now hear from some of the others as to the particular essential which is alone possessed by them," said the chairman. The Congregational Shepherd sat up and delivered himself tersely and forcibly.

"It appears to me that our church stands for the priesthood of the laity. We affirm and bear witness to the fact that the minister is the minister of those to whom he ministers and that their act in a real sense makes him their minister. The other churches emphasize the truth that the ministry is the ministry of the church,—we lay stress upon the other truth, that it is the ministry of the people as well. And Scripture seems to justify our position."

This declaration called out a long discussion. It was recognized that the voice of the laity had been somewhat silenced in certain churches; but the other side must not be overlooked, that the final power of ordination rested with the higher orders. This appeared to the majority present as more in keeping with the Acts of the Apostles.

The Methodist minister then said that the pre-eminent doctrines of his church were individual conversion and final perfection, and these were, at the least, obscured in the other communions.

"But that is not true," cried all the Shepherds. "We *all* believe in conversion."

Quotations from forms and liturgies were offered in support of this united assertion. It was certainly

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the strong feature of Christ's preaching and ought to be the dominant note of every ministry. The Priest declared that they had missionaries for no other purpose than to emphasize conversion.

There was a lull in the debate. Then the chairman rose, his face glowing with rapture.

"My dear brothers," he said quietly, "permit me to sum up our discussion on points of agreement. We appear to be united on the great Christian doctrines. Putting aside for the moment our different interpretations, let us thank God that we all believe in the Undivided Trinity. We believe that the Bible is the inspired revelation of God, and that Jesus Christ is manifested God. We believe in the Incarnation, the Atonement, the Resurrection, the Ascension of Christ, and His Gift of the Holy Ghost the Comforter. We believe that He founded a church for the salvation of souls by the development of character. We believe that He instituted two sacraments as means of grace, and that He appointed ministers to preach the glad tidings of salvation throughout the world. We believe that Jesus is the Saviour of all men, and that all who love and serve Him shall enter into eternal life. Our work here is to worship God by lip and life, to help our fellow men, to especially rescue the fallen and lift them up towards higher things. In all humility and sincerity, I ask you, if these agreements are not sufficient to demand of us sympathetic and corporate action."

Just then the dinner chimes sounded in the hall. The Shepherds solemnly rose for the benediction, after which, led by the Rector, they wended their way towards the dining-room.

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At the afternoon conference it was soon apparent that there was really only one subject of serious difference among them, that relating to the ministry, and more especially to the Historic Episcopate—the crux of all argument and theological warfare for ages. Here their disagreements seemed hopelessly irreconcilable. The Roman and Anglican Shepherds contended that it was a heritage from Christ,—it could not be surrendered for even the great cause of unity.

"Where do you place us?" pertinently asked the Methodist. "Are we not Christ's ministers?" It was a delicate question, but these men were not there to allow any over-regard for one another's feelings to keep back what they deemed to be the truth. So the Priest at once made his reply:

"I'm afraid that the Catholic church can only consider you pious and godly laymen. We do not for a moment question your sincerity, and we gratefully acknowledge the splendour of your self-sacrificing labours, but we cannot conscientiously regard you as the genuine successors of the original Apostles. There have been too many breaks in the succession." For a Roman, this was an exceedingly generous statement.

"My position is somewhat different," said the Rector. "There has been a change in my views. At one time, not so very long ago, I held that our Non-conformist Brethren had no ministerial authority whatever and that their sacraments were empty and meaningless. But I am now glad to think that they are the ministers of Christ, but irregularly ordained."

A good-humoured smile greeted this statement.

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"Let us get back to first principles," said the Presbyterian. "Scripture must be our guide here as everywhere."

"That I cannot allow," replied the Priest. "The Catholic church rests her claims upon tradition as well as upon God's Word. And surely the voice of history ought to carry weight."

The debate waxed warm and interesting. It was readily acknowledged that for the first fifteen hundred years episcopacy was almost universal. But the real question was not seriously affected by this fact. Is the Episcopate necessary to the very existence of the church or only an institution for the well-being of the church? This was the real point at issue. It brought forward a host of authorities on both sides of the question. Never had there been a time when the matter was not open to dispute. An appeal to the Fathers resulted in divided testimony.

But several of the Shepherds did not want to listen to tradition. "What saith the Scripture?"

A lengthy discussion here followed on the support of the New Testament. First, what was Christ's declaration?

"It is quite clear that the Gospels offer no substantial witness to the theory of the Historic Episcopate," said the Baptist Shepherd, with a good deal of unnecessary emphasis.

"Not so fast, sir," replied the Rector. "The Old Testament had a threefold ministry, and that by divine appointment. So we are justified in expecting that Jesus would continue the same in the church of His own creation. Otherwise you make a disagreement between the Father and the Son. On

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consulting the Gospels we find in Christ, the Twelve, and the Seventy a very clear continuation of the old plan."

"But we are not objecting to a threefold ministry," immediately answered the Presbyterian. "You may have a sevenfold ministry if you please. But here is where, I think, Presbyterianism takes issue with the Roman and Anglican churches. They treat the ministry as if it were a thing apart altogether from the church, transmitted mechanically by a kind of almost magical contact. But we hold that the ministry is the organ of the church, and has its being in the life of the church. It is the ministry of the Body, has its being in the Body, and derives its life from the Body: in a word, that it is not a separate entity from the church, but itself part of the church. The chairman just now spoke of a threefold ministry in the New Testament as found in Christ, the Twelve, and the Seventy. But Christ has no successor—He is eternally present in His church. Your bishops are supposed to derive their succession from the Apostles, so that your present threefold ministry cannot claim to be a continuation of the three orders in the Gospels. It is not the number of orders that concerns us, but the power and authority that you claim for the episcopate. Can there be any doubt, for instance, that Timothy was ordained by the hands of the Presbytery? Will you not tell us frankly where you find in Scripture the proof for your contention that ordination rested exclusively in the office of the Bishop?"

The Priest accepted the challenge and quoted passages from the Acts to show that ordination rested with certain Apostles.

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"Yes, but when and how were they changed into bishops?" asked the Methodist. "It is undoubted that 'episcopos' and 'presbyter' were interchangeable terms in the Apostolic days."

And he proceeded to substantiate this position with quotations. He further contended that as a matter of history the episcopate disappeared for more than a century in the early church. And if that were not sufficient to discredit the theory of the Historic Episcopate, what about the undoubted flaws in the succession from time to time?

Thus the debate went on throughout the afternoon. There seemed small chance of reconciliation here.

"We do not object to bishops," said the Congregational minister. "On the contrary, we believe that this venerable and practical institution has more than justified itself in the past centuries. I think that I speak for my brethren of the non-episcopal churches when I say that we are ready to acknowledge the value of the episcopate. It makes for historic continuity, though not furnishing the sole means of the church's perpetuation. We cannot conscientiously declare that our ministry is invalid because we lack the ordaining hands of a bishop. All that we solemnly and firmly protest against is the idea that "Nulla ecclesia sine episcopo."

All except the Roman and Anglican Shepherds assented to this view.

Then the Lutheran minister stood up to speak and everybody listened carefully to his earnest words.

"Men and brethren" he said, "we appear to be at the real parting of the ways. Perhaps you will permit one who represents a church, whose origin

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and early history centred about this doctrine, to express his mind. The Lutheran church has always held in high esteem the office of a bishop, but she could not in the sixteenth century, nor can she now, accept the Roman and extreme Anglican positions. What I particularly want to say is, Are we not exaggerating the form and making little of the spirit? I should like in all earnestness to ask a straight question, to which I desire a straight reply. Would we care to affirm that in any one of the Christian churches to-day the Holy Spirit of God is not manifesting Himself? Beyond any doubt, good is being done by all the churches. Souls are being saved through the instrumentality of each and every communion. Is this by the Spirit of the Everlasting Trinity or is it not?"

And he looked intensely into the eyes of all his brethren and searched their inmost hearts. There could only be one answer to this question and it came in unfaltering tones from them all.

"All good is of the Holy Ghost. And we are glad to see the evidences of His Presence among all Christian people," said the Shepherds, in unison.

Straightening himself, the speaker continued:

"Do you not believe, that if He blesses their work, He will recognize their ministry? Is it conceivable that God would set His seal upon the labours of any man who was sinfully or unlawfully or sacrilegiously assuming an office to which he had not been called? 'By their fruits ye shall know them.' Do you not recall the Master's warning, 'Forbid him not, for he that is not against us is on our part.' Let us consider the Apostleship of Paul."

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instantly the men sat up, for here was a subject that had been the bone of contention for ages.

"Who ordained him?" cried the speaker. "Was his an ordination of the spirit or according to some particular form? You know how he defended his claims to Apostleship: 'For the seal of mine apostleship are ye in the Lord.' He pointed to the evident blessing of God upon his work. Oh, my brothers in Christ, how long will we continue to dwell upon certain forms, as though the infinite God were tied exclusively to one channel for His wondrous grace? Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same spirit. And there are differences of administration but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations but it is the same God Who worketh all in all."

A tense silence fell upon the group. With one accord their minds travelled back over the centuries and halted in the Upper Room at Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. There the infant Church was empowered by the Holy Ghost. Upon the whole assembly the Spirit had descended. Was this an isolated and unique incident? Did the Master give His final commission to a select few or to the whole church? The ages bore striking witness to the truth that God had not confined the operation of His Spirit to particular groups or within particular forms. It was quite true that there was a diversity of gifts—to some Apostles, to others Evangelists, to others Pastors and Teachers. But the Holy Ghost was sent upon all the Church, and the Great Commission and authority was given to the whole Ecclesia. God had made ministers now by one form and again by an-

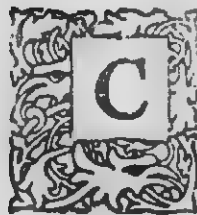
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other. Never had there been absolute uniformity in the method of bestowing His Holy Spirit. As this fact became real to the Shepherds they were filled with reverence and joy. One by one they sank upon their knees and buried their faces in their hands. They seemed to hear the wind breathing softly through the room. The fading daylight made everything shadowy and uncertain, but as they lifted their faces a faint shimmer of light appeared to touch the head of each of them, and a Voice that sounded like the flow of distant waters rang gently upon their ears: "As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you." Then suddenly the setting sun broke through the clouds and poured its golden beams across the kneeling men. They rose, and looking into one another's faces, read the message that flashed from all their eyes. God had taught them that the ordination of the Spirit was the supreme requirement. Their hearts were lifted up in praise. Their tongues trembled with the new language of love. Together they sang the Gloria in Excelsis, and went out to rejoice in the afterglow of the sunset.

IV

The Sacrament of Unity

*"And they came with haste and found the Babe
"And when they saw it, they made known concerning the saying which
was spoken to them about this Child.
"And all that heard it, wondered at the things which were spoken to
them by the shepherds." - St. Luke ii. 16-18.*



CHRISTMAS Day dawned clear and cold in the town of Northsea. It found the citizens in a state of reverent and hopeful expectation. A service had been arranged where all Christians were to partake together of the Lord's Supper. This special communion was to be administered in the Anglican Church, chiefly because it was the largest edifice in the town. The hour set for the service was ten o'clock in the morning, and preparation had been carefully made for it. A short service of instruction for communicants had been held a few days before when the form and administration of the Sacrament was thoroughly explained. On this occasion the Rector, in the presence of his brother-ministers, told the people plainly and frankly the reason and nature of this common act of worship.

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"The Lord's Supper," he said, "is the possession of no religious society. It is the Lord's Table, and to it are admitted the children of the Lord. It is not a badge but a blessing. Here let the hungry come and eat; here let the thirsty come and drink; here let all who desire grace come and receive it. The Anglican Church has made a rule that 'there shall be none admitted to the Holy Communion until such time as he be confirmed or be ready and desirous to be confirmed,' and it is only right that the people should understand how this order can be reconciled with a service of intercommunion. Confirmation is not a hindrance to ecclesiastical hospitality. It does not forbid us to bring our friends to the Feast of divine friendship. They do not ask to be 'admitted to the Holy Communion;' they come as guests, to whom is given all gracious hospitality. With our domestic regulations they are not concerned. There are some of you who will remember that in the year 1870, when the revisers of the New Testament, comprising representatives of all Protestant communions, began their immortal labours, Dean Stanley invited them to join in the Lord's Supper in Westminster Abbey. There was a protest made by some sensitive souls and the matter was referred to the highest Anglican authority, the Archbishop of Canterbury. He ruled that the rubric just quoted applies 'solely to our own people, and not to those members of foreign and dissenting bodies who occasionally conform. The church,' he said, 'places no bar against occasional conformity.' All Christian people, therefore, are welcome to the Table of the Lord. These acts of courtesy and hospitality

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have always been grateful occasions. History records too few of them, but the heart of Christ must be tender with glad recognition of each and every act of Christian fellowship. Who can fail to remember with joy the happy day when the Recollet Fathers loaned their church to the Anglicans and Presbyterians for worship, and the acknowledgment of the latter in their gifts to the Roman Fathers of candles, candlesticks and altar-linen? And do we not remember how the Roman chaplain administered the Sacrament according to the rite of the Church of England to dying soldiers on the South African veldt? Even so, may not we, ministers and people together, meet at the Lord's Table on Christmas Day and there partake of the divine Feast of His Own Body and Blood?"

Thus, the whole town was stirred with eager longing on this bright festival of Christ's Nativity.

When the hour of service arrived, all the bells in the town sent forth their welcoming notes. And the people flocked from every quarter, until the old Anglican building, for so long sparsely occupied by worshippers, was filled with a great throng of eager Christians.

As the final notes of the bells died with lingering melody upon the air, the full, deep tones of the organ swelled through the stately church and thrilled the vast congregation with reverent and expectant joy. All eyes were turned towards the chancel. A long Table stood a few feet from the East end and was covered with a linen cloth of snowy whiteness. Upon it there had been placed the communion vessels, together with the bread and wine, and these were

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covered with a silken cloth, beautifully embroidered in a chaste ecclesiastical design. At either end of the Table there was a massive, seven-branched candelstick, which, at ordinary celebrations of the Eucharist, glowed with symbolic lights, but to-day they were not lighted.

When the seven Shepherds came from the vestry to take their places, the choir, composed of members selected from the different churches, rose in the stalls, whilst the organist played the prelude to the opening hymn. The only minister wearing robes was the Rector who, by common consent, was the celebrant of the day.

He took up his position behind the Holy Table, facing the people. On either side of him stood the other Shepherds. There was a brief silence, as the ministers, followed by the congregation, knelt for private prayer.

Then the choir burst into praise, and the great host stood and joined in the singing of the "Adeste Fideles." It was a hymn of exalted desire. By it the people expressed their experience of how "good and joyful a thing it is for brethren to dwell together in unity." The great waves of praise mounted to the vaulted roof of the church until every nook and corner of the building was throbbing with sound. Hearts were overflowing that day and some could only express their feelings in tears. It must have been like unto the time when Miriam and the host of Israel sang their "Jubilate" after the dividing of the sea.

When the hymn was ended there was a brief interval of silence, and then the rich, trembling voice

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of the Rector began the Lord's Prayer. Though not in keeping with the practice of the Church of England, it was repeated by the entire congregation. The service proceeded according to the Anglican Use, the Presbyterian minister reading the Epistle and the Roman Priest the Gospel. After the Creed had been recited, the Shepherds left their stations and came to the front of the chancel.

Then an unlooked-for thing occurred. Up to this time Betty Andrews had been seated in the front pew, holding her child close to her heart. By her side sat the Stranger, who had come to her rescue on that ever memorable night. These two, accompanied by the Rector's daughter, now came quietly forward and stood before the chancel entrance.

They were to act as sponsors and witnesses in the baptism of Betty's child. The huge, old-fashioned font had been filled with water and conveniently placed for the ceremony. The service was very simple. A few questions were asked by the Rector to which eager answer was made by Betty and the sponsors.

Now it happened on the night of the fire that the Baptist minister was the one who climbed the bodies of his companions and tenderly lifted the child through the broken window. And at the earnest request of Betty he consented to baptize her little boy. It was a grave departure from all his training and teaching, but it showed the reality of his wider vision that he was willing to do it. Taking the child up in his arms, he made a short prayer of dedication, and "discreetly and warily dipping it into the water," he pronounced the name, and said, "I

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Baptize thee in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, Amen." It seemed to him as he gave the child back to the glad arms of the foster-mother that he stood very close to the Master Who held the children in His arms and blessed them. Mothers in the church cried softly and strong men felt a lump come into their throats and a moisture into their eyes as Betty hurried to the vestry with her consecrated child. This ceremony was a touching and convincing evidence of that wide spirit of tolerance and charity which finds abundant illustration in the life and teaching of Christ. It will one day bind together the Christian communions with unbreakable bands of love, and make the church "fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners."

Whilst the choir sang a hymn of "consecration," Betty returned from the vestry. The child was clothed in a long robe of spotless white and nestled peacefully against the mother-heart. As they went quietly to the pew every one in the congregation thought of the Virgin-Mother whose Child was born on Christmas Day.

Then the Presbyterian minister gave the address, taking for his text the words of the prophet Isaiah: "A little Child shall lead them." There was no effort at rhetoric, no dramatic appeal, the words were direct and simple, and consequently forcible.

The people heard for the first time the story of the Shepherds' leading on the night of the fire. All the other circumstances were well known to them and this last explanation made the whole event stand out sharp and clear as of divine ordering. No one

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doubted now that God had used this nameless babe as a means of drawing together the churches and creating a new spirit in the town of Northsea.

Then the preacher passed to the Divine Child and the story of Christmas Day. The birth of Jesus was the re-birth of humanity. It called back the race from its complexity and artificiality to the simple and primary impulses and emotions of life. It declared that the fundamental principles ought to govern our relations towards God and man. The child-like qualities of unquestioning faith and worship, the simple innocence and naturalness of conduct—these were among the things that were of first importance. Christ repeated, with almost tiring reiteration, this conception of life in His preaching. The simple life and the simple faith—who could doubt that this was the burden of His teaching?

The Incarnation was the revelation of God's Fatherhood and man's sonship. It did not create that relationship. From all eternity God had been trying to make this truth clear to the mind of man. But for some reason He had failed to reach man's heart of understanding. So He gathered up all His love and wisdom and came Himself. Nevermore would man have cause to doubt the purpose of God regarding his destiny and work. The whole life of Jesus was a convincing testimony of the worth of each member of the human family. It must be necessary for Christ to begin at the very commencement of human life and travel up through all its stages, tasting every drop of misery and woe in order that He might exhibit His sympathy with every condition. There was now no height or reach of

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goodness impossible to man, for Jesus, the Man, had crested the highest peak of human attainment. There was now no depth of agony beyond His pity, for His Feet had been dipped in the hottest stream of human suffering. He had compassed the whole of life and was, therefore, able to lead men out of their completest failure into their highest glory. He had shut none out of His compassion, because of differences in creed or nation; but He protested vigorously against the formalism that excluded so many hungry and weary souls from the refreshment and rest afforded by His religion. Like unto the hard crust of earth which prevents the seed from finding a lodgment in the soil was the ceremonial theology of His own day. God was in every man, no matter how deeply the divinity might be buried beneath sin and unbelief, or how difficult it might be to break through the tough barriers of limitations and circumstances imposed by the narrow conceptions of man. Jesus laboured to make man realize his glorious destiny, and accepted gladly any desire, no matter how crude might be the man's theology, to serve and follow Him.

"My brother and sisters," cried the preacher, "we must be filled with the spirit of Our Lord and Master. There are none outside our sympathy and love,—none against whom the Church of Christ can ever close her gates. We need a new conception of the church. The centuries have so overlaid the original idea with hard exactions and narrow tests of orthodoxy, that the intention of the Master is forgotten. We require the very simplest definition. The church is the ideal humanity,—man in his most sacred

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possibilities. She should know no limit save that of humanity, for 'the field is the world.' She owns no barrier of caste or creed or race. She asks no credentials save those of unselfish service to mankind. We dare not forbid the church's privilege and protection to any soul whose heart is aflame with Christ-like passion for the good of others. Jesus did not impose arbitrary tests upon His disciples. The one requirement was love and loyalty to Him. Everywhere He uttered the same cry, 'Follow Me,' and the only way to follow Him is by going out and doing good. It was the formal, hide-bound Pharisee, whose punctilious observance of each slightest ceremony and tradition, made an effectual barrier to his own entry into the kingdom, as well as excluded those who longed to enter in. And we have been guilty of Phariseeism. None more grievously so than we who have stood here as your ministers."

As he said this, he half turned to the other Shepherds, and accepted their downcast faces as an acknowledgment of their share in the guilt of a narrow ecclesiasticism.

"We must stand ready now to welcome every earnest struggler after truth, no matter how poor and imperfect may be his understanding of theology," resumed the preacher, as with glowing eyes he turned again to the people. "For truth is wider than any man's interpretation of it. Indeed, may we not say that truth is larger and finer than all the theologies of every age and race. And there is no school of Christian culture that may not bring into the ever-widening church some new phase of truth. Our

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theologies are the accumulation of the centuries. Each age, with its new demands, requires fresh expression of doctrine. And how wonderfully the old deposit of truth committed to the church's keeping by Christ has broken out into new light for the dispelling of each cloud of darkness! Jesus meant truth to be general. All the past years are but the story of the rich harvests that have sprung from this seed. And we have not yet exhausted its powers of production. We cannot tell what unexperienced difficulties lie before us, but we are sure that the truth of Christianity will provide a solvent for them all."

There was a momentary pause as the preacher stepped forward a little as though to come closer to his rapt hearers. Then, throwing out his arms in a gesture of appeal he cried aloud:

"Only let us bid men come to Christ. For when they have known Him as Lord and Master, all perplexities will vanish away. No organization or form must stand between the individual soul and the Saviour. Believe me, there are hungry, tired people, who are kept back from the Christ because of our blind and narrow prejudices and divisions. Whatever reasons justified our separation in the past, let us not be guilty of maintaining them in the future. The old conditions have gone. Let the old jealousies and bigotry go with them. We are here in the twentieth century, with its magnificent opportunities, its heavy demands, its incomparable resources. Dare we stay the progress of the church by carrying into it the theological controversies of the sixteenth century? Christ is the power of salvation. Let us go with Him into the new times, with the new light of

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His truth, and under the wide and inspiring vision of His leadership."

His voice dropped to a quieter tone as he gave the invitation:

"Here at this holy Table, in the feast of His own ordaining, let us pledge ourselves to common love and service. Feed here upon the Bread of His life. Drink here the Wine of His spirit. Consecrate yourselves with us in this Sacrament of Unity."

It seemed a long time before the people came from under the spell of the preacher. The sermon was unusual. This new conception of the church as the body of redeemed humanity was in sharp conflict with the old idea. Hitherto they had been taught that the church was a selection out of humanity, made by the most arbitrary tests of orthodoxy. But the new view appeared to harmonize well with Christ's life and teaching. Could there be any doubt what He would do, if He were on earth now? Would He not gladly consider as members of His church all those who tried to fashion their lives after His example, and spent their time in ministries of love to mankind?

But these thoughts were stayed for the moment by the trembling voice of the celebrant, inviting the people to draw near and partake of the Holy Sacrament. How they poured out their souls in penitent confession! And deep was the silence, as the Rector took the elements in his hands and, using the exact words of the original institution, blessed and hallowed them.

Then, whilst the whole congregation waited in tense

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silence, kneeling devoutly upon its knees, the choir softly hymned the communion song of union:

For all Thy church, O Lord, we intercede:
Make Thou our sad divisions soon to cease:
Draw us the nearer, each to each, we plead,
By drawing all to Thee, O Prince of Peace:
Thus may we all one Bread, one Body be,
Through this Blest Sacrament of Unity.

This was the very gate of Heaven. The presence of Christ was so real that some looked to see Him at the altar, whilst others fancied that they heard His Footsteps passing down the aisles. And a few listened for the soft moving of angels' wings, for surely they must be present in this holy place.

The Shepherds humbly received the Sacrament at the hands of the white and shaking Rector and then rose to assist in the administration to the people. Betty was the first to move up to the altar. She held her sleeping child close against her breast as though to still the tumult of her heart. And by her side walked the Stranger, with lowly bent head.

Almost the entire congregation received communion that day. Not a soul left the church. As the streaming worshippers went forward and knelt with outstretched hands for the Bread of Life, the organ softly pealed its sweet strain of music until the air was pulsing with delicate harmony. On the faces of some there was holy rapture; others let the tears flow unchecked in a soundless joy; others sobbed aloud in uncontrollable emotion. On that morning Northsea was baptized with the Holy Ghost. The people had walked with God, and fed upon the Bread, of which, if a man eat he will never hunger.

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The service was closed quietly, and as the "Amen" of the benediction breathed softly through the church, the Shepherds retired to the vestry. But the congregation remained upon its knees for a long time, pleading with Christ for strength and love and wisdom in the coming days.

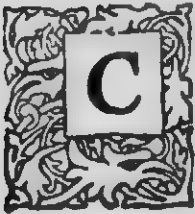
Perhaps it was only fancy, or the result of overwrought imagination, but all the people testify to the reality of the incident.

Just as the last, tremulous notes of the organ melted away, the seven-branched candlesticks in the chancel blazed into light. The astonished congregation looked eagerly towards the altar and were amazed to see a Figure, all in white, standing there. His Hands were uplifted in blessing, and round about His Head there was a halo of shimmering light. It was the vision of the Universal Church, with Jesus in the midst.

V

The Return of the Shepherds

"And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen."—St. Luke ii. 20.



CHRISTIAN Unity is a "unity of the spirit." It is not primarily concerned with forms. Any attempt at uniformity of method, either in worship or organization, must end in failure. The ages bear striking witness to the truth of this contention. Christ did not pray for unity in the sense of absolute agreement. The oneness that He desired was real and spiritual. He did not ask that His disciples should be one as James and John were one, or as brothers are one, but "as Thou, Father, art in Me and I in Thee, that they may be one in Us." It was a unity like unto that of the Godhead, and not a mere uniformity in symbols and institutions. This must be borne in mind in all efforts towards Christian unity. In the perfected church of Christ there will still be room for differences in external expression of worship and government. The essential requirement is agreement in purpose and central principles.

Nowhere do we discover uniformity. The law

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written throughout nature is Unity in diversity. No one doubts that there is one unerring purpose working throughout the natural kingdom, "one far-off, divine event to which the whole creation moves," but this purpose is manifested in a thousand beautiful forms.

Art reveals a glorious unity but not a tiresome uniformity. The artist aims to reveal the beautiful and to cultivate the imagination of man, but the forms are manifold and contribute to the picturesqueness of life. Science and medicine operate according to the same wise plan. One great object in view—the study of Nature's secret workings or the healing of the body—but no two men are identical in method.

Why, then, do we unwisely hope for unanimity in all things pertaining to religion? Is it not a greater thing for men to be knit together in a common allegiance to one God and Saviour and service, and yet have freedom to express their loyalty in diverse ways?

Nor does it militate in the slightest against this desirable unity that men should have strong convictions about the superiority of their own organizations and methods. Let each regiment in the army believe that it is the strongest and best. Let each architect cherish the proud belief that his plans are the superior of his fellows. Only in this way can men claim and hold the respect of their brethren. But foolish and presumptuous, indeed, would be any regiment that considered itself the whole army. And ridiculous would any architect become, if he sneered at his companions in the same work, and regarded them all as imposters and charlatans. Not otherwise is it with the Christian churches. The deeper a man's convictions of the worthiness of his own creed, the more

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respect ought he to have for those who differ from him, but who are just as loyal and sincere as he is. One man may worship God out of the free and spontaneous utterances of his own heart—another may conduct his worship under a splendid liturgy that has been sanctified by the use of centuries of saints. But both worship God and are intensely serious and devout. One group of men work under a ministry that has been set apart by their own act and prayer to God for the spirit of consecration—another group are led by clergy who have been ordained by the united act of a whole House of Bishops. But the Eternal Spirit rests upon both groups of men and makes effectual their consuming desire to serve the everlasting Christ. The one sufficient thing is that Christians should be one in their witness to the truth of the Gospel. This is the only real, abiding unity, and for this we need to work and pray.

When the Shepherds returned from their uplifting service on Christmas Day, it was not with the intention of disbanding their own organizations and forming one Christian body. They went back to their respective parishes freshly consecrated for the work that awaited them there. The wider vision was theirs, the new impulse to charity was behind them, the re-dedication of their ministry to the poor and sinful lent a vigour and gladness to their labours hitherto unknown. Never again would fall from their lips the hot words of condemnation upon fellow Christians. They were done with recriminations and innuendos forever.

Wherever opportunity offered, they were glad to work in union with their brethren. Often afterwards

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they were found in one another's churches, both for worship and work. They planned to hold each year such a service of united intercession as they enjoyed on Christmas Day. And they addressed one another's flocks whenever invitations were given. In a hundred ways they manifested Christian fellowship.

Perhaps the most striking outcome of this new spirit of unity was the attitude towards the unchurched. Previous to this time, only a little more than half of the adult population ever attended any religious service. The churches were so busy "holding the fort" that no time could be spared for the unenlisted. But now the "respectable" church members were left to themselves, and the Shepherds went out into the highways and lanes in order to recover the lost. Did not the Master leave the ninety and nine and go after the one wandering sheep and seek till He had found it? So the ministers of Northsea were daily seen in places that were unaccustomed to their visits. In this compassionate service they were ably assisted by their flocks. Church organizations were alive and working. The people were so busy "gathering the wanderers in" that they had no time for bazaars and concerts. Indeed, there was no need for them. Money came in generously until all departments of the church's activities were thriving. There was even a good surplus left over, and for the first time in the town's history the cause of missions was given a place. It was not long before Northsea was able to send its own missionary to the foreign field.

The congregations grew apace. Half-filled churches were now unknown. The old fear that recognition of one another would damage their own

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flocks had been exploded. There never was greater loyalty. Denominational papers were read more zealously than ever and largely because there was a spirit of charity in them that was truly Christ-like.

Then there came the question of social conditions in the town.

What was to be done to prevent further feuds between the fishermen and quarrymen? The Shepherds met together to debate the matter. There was not unanimity among them as to the place of wines and beverages in society. But all were agreed that something ought to be done to create a healthier atmosphere in the town. The saloon supplied a want in the lives of working men. They were social creatures like everybody else and demanded some place of recreation and mutual association. The business and professional man had his club. But the labouring man could afford no such luxury. Their homes were small, their work was hard and long. It was the merest justice that asked for them a place where they could meet and ease their lives of drudgery. The churches had done nothing for them, and the saloon was the result of their neglect. Prevention is always better than remedy, but there was still the duty of reclaiming back to sobriety and decency the men who fulfilled their social desires in the disastrous intimacy of the saloon.

So a resolution was passed to build a church club for these men.

A petition was circulated and subscriptions were asked for. It was astonishing how quickly responses came. Within a week there was enough money in hand to build the house. And before the harbour was

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cleared of ice, a handsome stone structure invitingly faced the water, provided with every comfort and convenience for the rough, honest men of the quarry and the sea.

Then came the difficulty of providing the Church House with efficient officers. First of all, a superintendent was needed and a matron. The minor positions might be easily filled, but the success of the institution depended upon the right persons for the two principal offices. The old Rector made a suggestion that solved one problem.

"I do not know a better person for matron than Betty Andrews," he said. There was an instant chorus of approval, so a small committee was appointed to wait on her and persuade her to take the office. It was not so easy finding a superintendent. Many names were offered but the same objection applied to them all—lack of experience. At length it was decided to advertise. Perhaps some sister town would be able to provide them with a man.

The special committee waited upon Betty and informed her of the plans and wishes of the management of the Church House. They pleaded eloquently with her to accept the position of matron.

"There are two things to be considered," she quietly said. "In the first place, what about my child? I cannot leave him."

"That can be easily arranged," replied the chairman, who happened to be the Rector. "We shall provide you with comfortable quarters for yourself and child. And I am sure the little lad will be a great blessing to the work."

"Then," said the wise Betty, "a good deal depends

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upon the superintendent. I must leave my answer in abeyance until he is appointed."

This was satisfactory to the committee, but they were determined that the other appointment should be subject to Betty's approval.

When the Stranger in his little country store read the advertisement of the Club House, and the news item regarding the position of matron, his heart leaped with a great desire. Ever since the night of their first tragic meeting he had loved Betty. And as the days passed, his passion grew until it dominated his whole thought and life. But he had always been held back from declaring his love by the fear that she might, in the sweet generosity of her heart, accept him just because he had saved her from the cruel hands of the fishermen. And though he wanted her more than anything in all the wide world, he was unwilling to take her, except as the gift of love.

It is strange how small things, which have no necessary relation with our affections, bring our longings to a definite determination. The Stranger did not base his hope of acceptance with Betty on the ground of their possible work together in the Church House. To this simple man's soul there was only one sufficient reason for marriage. Any consideration other than love, whether convenience or expediency or social ambition, was a pollution of the sweet sacrament. But the necessity of officering the Church House provided him with the opportunity that he had so long waited for. So he drove into town to plead his suit.

He was fortunate in finding Betty alone at the Rectory. In simple, faltering words he told her of his love and asked her to be his wife. Betty sat

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dreaming for a few minutes. Was she worthy of so rich a gift as this man's love? Was there in her the necessary strength and devotion to fulfill the desires of her heart? All the dreams of her girlhood had suffered violence in the past year, but she felt richer and better for her sorrow. It made her worthier to wear the golden crown of womanhood. So she rose quietly and went to him. Gently slipping her hands into his, she looked up at his eager face and smiled her answer into his anxious eyes.

Thus the Church House was furnished with a superintendent and a matron. Together they began the splendid work, the success of which was now beyond all doubt. Before many weeks had passed, the fishermen and quarrymen buried the hatchet of long-standing enmity. The cheer and comfort of their new surroundings made the cheap, tawdry glitter and noise of the saloon repulsive. The wretched dives and drinking dens were obliged to close their doors, and their proprietors to move off elsewhere, because their patronage had failed. The new and sweet flowers had crowded the rank and ill-smelling weeds out of the vineyard.

Northsea became famous throughout the land. Visitors to the town were amazed at its orderliness. There was no prudishness or oppressive piety about the people. The citizens lived a natural, healthy life, enjoying themselves in the very pastimes that had at one time been condemned by some of the churches. But they were always ready to help any worthy cause. If disaster fell upon another town, or famine afflicted the inhabitants of a foreign land, the people of Northsea were the first to organize relief. The com-

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petition in business circles was keen, but there was no tendency to take an unscrupulous advantage of another man. All worked together in peace and harmony. They were not perfect, far from it, they were simply human men and human women endeavouring to manifest the Christian religion in their daily lives.

It happened about this time that a noted lecturer was touring the country. He was exceedingly clever and scholarly. Wherever he went there were crowds to hear him and he held them in the hollow of his hand. The papers were everywhere sounding his praises. The subject of his lecture was, "The New Thought." It was in reality an attack upon Christianity. He held up to the light the creed of the Christian and with masterly hand dissected it and showed its falseness. He threw doubt upon the Historic Christ and attempted to prove that His teachings were borrowed from other faiths. His particular weapon was the divisions of Christians. With flashing wit and brilliant stroke he unmasked their hypocrisy and exhibited their inconsistencies. Then he spent a few minutes in describing "The New Thought," which, to the observant hearer, was merely the ethics of Christ without reference to the supernatural. Beyond all doubt he was magnetic, forceful, eloquent.

He wrote to Northsea and asked for a date. The matter was submitted to the Church House committee. There was a strong feeling against giving him a hearing. But one of the Shepherds rose and said:

"By all means let him come. He may be able to teach us something. And surely we are not so weak-kneed in our loyalty to the Master that this man

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can persuade us into accepting another doctrine."

This counsel prevailed. More than this, the great Hall of the Church House was thrown open to the lecturer and he was asked to be the guest of the town.

The great man, wondering, came. He was received with the utmost kindness. A large number of the citizens turned out to the lecture and gave him a courteous hearing, but somehow his eloquence failed him. His wit seemed to himself to be without point. His treatment of the "unhappy divisions" of Christendom fell hopelessly to pieces. The lecture was much more disappointing to himself than to the audience. He was ashamed of the whole thing.

After the lecture, he was asked to step down into the dining-hall, where light refreshments would be served. The seven Shepherds sat side by side at the same table. The officers of the different churches were introduced and bade him welcome. It was a royal feast of brotherly love. They talked openly and freely about their Christian work. Each sentence more and more astounded the famous lecturer. He felt uneasy, an intruder upon this scene of harmony.

When he left early next morning, there were a few representatives at the train to see him off. They wished him "Godspeed" and asked him to come again. As he sat in the "Pullman" and nervously wiped the perspiration from his forehead, his mind was hammering out serious doubts about "The New Thought." He felt sure that his lecture in the neighbouring town would be a failure. And it was. The audience thought so, the newspapers said so, his own heart told him so. He could never again go upon the platform, so he wrote and cancelled all his engagements.

Then he tried to think over the situation, but his

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mind always kept coming back to Northsea. Through all the tangled skein, his evening at the little town by the sea ran like a golden thread. He was obliged to surrender. No philosophy or science could stand against the reality of the Christian faith when really held and lived. Like so many other thinking men, he had been driven away from the church by the narrow sectarianism of a warring Christianity. But it was a joy to be on the road home again. The peace that passeth all understanding flooded his life and calmed his troubled soul.

He wrote to the superintendent of the Church House and told his story. He was anxious now to devote himself to the cause of Christ. If the Northsea churches were willing to acknowledge him, he would like to become their apostle. Without financial responsibility to them, he would again take up a lecturing tour, if he could use their names as patrons of his new evangel.

And thus the Spirit of Unity was preached throughout the land by one of the ablest advocates of modern times.